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JUMBISH

Elouise Loftin

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by

Elouise Loftin

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Elouise Loftin is one with poetry.
No preambles. No workshop warmups.
She begins in an essence of poetry that vibrates,
pulsates and burns where we live.
Her voice, her visions are oblique, peripheral
and, at once, dead-on.
Read, and you will know the extraordinary
measure of her craft.

A. E. Prettyman

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To

Flora, Gerard and Bambi

Woman

as a child i was
constantly reminded
of the size of my eyes
or how i just saw "evahything"
and was always warned
not to look into grown folks mouths
somehow i find myself looking to
where i've been looking all the time
into folks mouths caught in poses
that pierce all time and distances
gaping off into space
giving correction to error
and knowing that you don't realise
that i can see you from where
you can't see me
see you

They'll Nevah Get Me

the way my eye
balls dry up and flake
away down the front of
my sweater and on my shoes
and people ask what are
you looking for
the way my lips fight my
teeth turn white and crack
like pumpkin seeds the children
bless the streets with
this is the pain
today i saw your face in
a book
flesh grinning and dancing
across the page hiding the
pain or ignorant to it
that is then how it was
you'd say
that is now how it is
you should remember
i see more of you
my eyeballs flaking down
my face chest and shoes
like this
nothing changes sometimes
the degree of blindness
is more or less varied
i want to see
with less pain
i thought today
its all about a
battle for mind
and who's got yours

These Streets

These streets
I once trusted
Wrote poems as they passed
beneath my feet
Opened feelings to its face
And shared my dream
as they contracted for buses
I was running for
they have betrayed my feet.
I once smelled of flowers
pressed between the pages
of young girls and grandmothers
They have stolen my odor
and spread the smell of death
and gasoline high into my body.
Now I must become a righteous thief
and take back what was mine
With the lesson of not trusting
That which was never my own.

"Old women will not enter Paradise: they will be made young and beautiful first." The Prophet

Weeksville Women

old Black ladies
carryin shopping bags
full of more shopping bags
memories and dreams
gap their legs
on buses
and say things like
"don't God work in mysterious ways, baby
sweety, your's is just startin, sugar"
old Black ladies with wise written
on their faces youth & future
written in their eyes
spread wide open up to me
stretch out their feet
cast down on their legs
and adjust their veins
like road maps they say
where they got on when they got to leave
and fan fan fan
they got so much
to be hot about

Dogs Howl'd All Nite Amanda Slept Out

seems like first they had me in some kinda court
i didn't see but a coupla faces but voices was all around
talkin and givin signs like i aint nevah seen
seems like i went into anotha room with some new cloths
folded ovah ma' arms then i look around and here i am
on this here train or some kinda movin box
it was some kinda beautiful and i laid down and went
to sleep known i was goin someplace far
next thing you know it i'm standin on this ramp
lookin out onto the water then i look ovah ma' right
and the man what carry'd me there aint said a word
the whole time he just kinda look outa them big eyes
what he had and right off i know what to do
now we done got where i figured we was goin i right
spected him to speak but he just stood there lookin
into the water strangest thing i ever did see can't
explain it 'cept to say seems like words was writ
round the man's head just floatin round for me to see
and he aint looked up first time yet anyway his head
was sayin somthin bout
manda, now see what you does see
learn what you does know
readin was no problem but what it was sayin aint made
a bitta sense at the time so i figured it was nothin
to bump ma head up against no wall about and i turn'd
round and start'd lookin at the water i tell you the
water just as blue and big as the sky coulda grabb'd
me a handful and eat it some kinda wonda full round
bout now i see comin up on the otha side of the ramp
come walkin this here man from where i was standin i
knew he couldn't see me but he moved like he know'd i was there
i looks ovah to the man what brought me there and some
more words is jumpin ovah him
manda, it was all about
a battle for mind

by this time the man on the otha side standin there at
the foot of the water i tell you it was nothin you done
ever did see he dressed in this long robe white and gold
places all melted in it not like color but like somebody
had done melt'd it down dipp'd they hand in it and flick'd
it all ovah him playful like his head was wrapp'd all up
in white and dropp'd away down his back round bout his waist
he musta been every bitta six feet tall fact is i'd betta
fat man he was more than that with that head piece hangin
all down his back and round his face and all
if he aint look'd like them men on ma dream book
shut ma mouth wide open well the likes of what all i aint
nevah seen before start'd goin on i looks ovah to see what
the man what brought me there had to say and god if he wasnt gone
i looks back on the man at the ramp and he done carry'd himself
right into the water he walk on out there like it was pie
he turns round and music started jumpin outa the sky and water
it was all over well i aint nevah seen the likes of nothin
like this in ma life here this man here is kneelin on the water
making all kinda signs with his hands movin and his lips movin
and just grinnin from ear to ear and all the children i done
evah seen smile was right there the music seen to get hungry
to me and it got louda and louda some kinda wonda full and
it seems like it grow'd all aroun me and i was even smellin
like it the man he there on the water and rear'd back on his heels
he cup'd his hands in front of his face and good god and four
quarters if all the light in the sky aint pour'd itself right
into his hands his face was clear as the night i know'd that face
good as i know my right hand palm his face was every bit the same
of what all the man what brought me there and the music was all
ovah us and i said to myself manda first thing you do
is go look up and see what all wonda full give in your book
then i remember'd i left ma book at home
and then i remember'd i aint had to go nowhere to get it

Sunni's Unveiling

Past mosquito bites and brown
soft black hair and moles
yes, i could lift my blouse
and show you who i am
let you hear the thunder
on the blood drop
from my soul
raise my finger in witness
to my strong foundation
More than sweat and blood
the good feeling of after-birth
is always mine
a mouth full of smiles and daggers
and the discrimination of virgo
here in the moon of me
where i rise
More than hot-eyed angry words
turn to soft and children
at the touch of men
slidding across my mind
I dance
Snap my fingers
at the table of my desires
Talk with the food of creation
in my mouth
Seduce life
Chew my nails and Do it
from elbow to wrist i know
the moisture of my nose
before tissues
I'm a Black woman
I throw my head back and laugh
at the cry of over-crowded
Knowing the smell of lies
as the whole world
sits in my belly.

reshaped noses
(a love poem)

saturday twelve to nine and daily
three to six office hours
call for
call please any number
any number that pleases you
there i will be
125th east of new york
my name is on the door mat
mailbox, it waits for you
mailbox
free information
and consultation
surgery plastic corrected
i'm here cause i do it so well
etc. i carry it on
dont need backward no more
however i come
wet
you'll be sure to get it
breast eyelids
skin loose lips
ears outstanding
nothwithstanding
lifting face

These Circles

The circles we are travillin
are catchin up with us now
Young mouths just weaned
will whisper power-full
Black truths on your now
deaf ears
You will make God-blessed prophets
and truth bringers that may lay bare
your own doom
You who could give witness to it all
Day will bring mirrors to reflect
the seeds you are plantin
and there are not enough eyes for planters
without waters to feed the grounds they lay
And the witness will see in his reapins
Ninety percent of all accidents begin
in the home they say and
at nite with their back turned
reminiscenes of themselves as
after thoughts of a selfish-less-ness
where the emmenagogic herbs failed
will bring no respect to their fathers
Circles are self-completing
where your back was
so your face is
Seeing blindly now
through musical houses—lives
will not hide you
but make your tomorrow nation
verbatim songs
of your present condition

Kilimanjaro

I've seen
Kilimanjaro
lay flat on her back
and draw dramatic
conclusions for strategy
Whispering secrets to
the sun's ear
causing jaws to drop
heads to turn
I've watched her kill
in love
stealing breaths
for her beauty
right here
on fulton street

Dear Lysette,

how are you fine i hope. i was by your house yesterday but
you didn't come to the door so i try to figure out what it is.
and do you know what i come up with. i figure you was trying to
hide yourself from me because you didnt want me to see
your stomach. you know i think you are pregnant. Lysette
i want to talk to you so please let me know for sure.
write back and let me know ok. Baby after everything
that is i still love you. i came to your house three or four times
and your mother told me you wasn't home. so just in case you
forgot my address it is 1606 fulton street. write me back ok.

Love,
Spoon

Deeper

it goes deeper than we see
that's why we tear holes
in our pants
stare with our asses
hanging out
forget our teeth or remember
them walk dog paths and let
them bite us
and maybe someone of us
will notice make us a
sandwich give us a song
button our coats cuss
us out and say they care
or don't but do anyway
take us to them and let us
cry laugh sleep or dance
if we feel and let us
heal where we hurt.
love is a fat woman with
a deep crevace between
her breast fodder for poems
saving octagon soap coupons.
an uncle with a broken zipper
and a bad leg who brushes
his teeth with baking soda
if he damn feels like it.
and inside of this at some time
we look and find our sources
getting up in the night
wringing their hands sitting
by the windows and bleeding
a lot around the corners
of their hearts.
it goes deeper

mama's song

in a quiet time
when all my juice is done
and i don't come
but just feel good
when its time
and my lips don't priss
with quick words and
no answers but parted
drop gods on the mind
i've made for you
and all the songs i've
hummed down the allys
of my time line your
throat and patience
is less stranger to me then
in a quiet time
when all my dreams
are done or changed
to fit my need
and all i love
call madness and
label me
explain away my time
yet sing the same
songs i have sung
but don't remember me
as i sit back and
rock away what's for me
to be remembered
will you remember me
as i am
as you know yourself

purple

purple jumps from
the cold lips of my father
through my sweatered body
to my heart
purple death in my chest
making plans
for his killers

A Black Lady

She sat on the Lex line #2
pink patent crossed feet
and goodluck fish danglin
from the wrist
Say hello
calmly nod but no more
cause she don't play with kids
Pink patent crossed feet
crust on the knee ash layin
in the thumb
How far down is she goin
Where is she comin from
and how far down is backin up
Stop starin
would if you could
but can't
cause spirits in her eyes say
she goin to the stop where you can
say more
and she don't have to hold
that bag so tight

origin: like a killer vibe

inside us
a madness.
calling to us to
save ourselves.
we are not allowed
total action on that
energy.
an energy. when
transformed.
a poem.
gotten rid of
inside of us.
back to something level
inside of us a madness
but to it
closer still.

gettin caught

if they catch you
with your pants down
offing your guard
or peeing for free
if they catch you
doing something crazy
with quotes around it
and try to make you
feel
like you been
catched
then you must be doing some
thing ok

Becoming
(for Larry-Rikers Is.NY)

You are past ages
famous only to your mother
because you had the dime to call
Your trials are dated
numbered, audienced
and judged by those
who you will ultimately judge
Joy at its highest level has become
opportunities to refuse our
delayed understanding
and laughter at our admittances of
your non-crimes and long awaited
awareness of you
our inquiries and pleasures
at your soon release and freedom from walls
You laugh knowing becoming wiser
that it is you who we await to free
the imprisioned on the outside
Awaiting your march around walls
rememberances of jericho
Nothing can stop you
because you are
and am
and are for real
are not famous or anything
but exist

Natural

we only go to
pure earth
no matter how they
slice us
it only increases our numbers
we good bait can catch a lie
before its told without being
eaten
steady movin underground
we surface ourselves
before the storm
or else we'll drown

poem for neville

you have done well
all things considered
when you feel the
tender parts of yourself
exercise your softness
at this dangerous moment
and remain strong all
the same
you have done well
passing through these
seasons of alien
white winters
and dogs biting at
your feet sipping &
sucking your life
you have done well
not fearing the tenderness
not fearing the times
you have done well
and will grow stronger still
safe inside of me.

Virginia

Sat in the sun
hands hung between her
legs spread wide open
and told me stories
of how she cut her
hair in the back
to make a V for
victory and when there
wasn't none for
Virginia
askin me ain't that a bitch
What do i know
i'm just a kid
when i know something
shut up you so damn grown
I remember you smokin
funny things blowin
smoke in my face
sayin soon i'd understand
Comin back a long time
after she can sew real
good now sayin she had been
to college why does my
mother keep sayin jail
and what's the difference
I see her now still beautiful
her nose cold numb like
an old dog we use to have
scared to breathe
thinkin this may be the last time
Sitting in the sun poppin green beans
me grown
and having to understand
for real

Time Poem

i spend most of my time
timing the time i spend
on how much time
i waste
listening to you talk about
the little time
we have left
which is most of the time
which is none

Tonite

under liquid lights
of neon lies and screams
of unredeemed pledges
a thousand cheeks
dented alcohol mouths and
outstretched palms
that cussed stray dogs on fours
and twos gargled in pluck
strangers to kiss and touch
will sleep the ground tonite
free lance pissing once stoned
believers who can't lay out
for a prayer rag will press
faces between the spaces
of park benches housed in
cages or haunt the public john
before the morning's chip in
and sing way over town
that i gotta woman

Jumbish-One

when you be tellin
the truth and
as god is your witness
and your judge
that it aint no lie
somebody who be sleep
gonna jump wake
others might roll
over and possum play
its hard tellin who's
who these days
but gettin back to
the matter
you'll know somethin
one way or another

Claver Place

We remember the amber lights
the elusive dodging
of sweaty mohair sweater
and salty cheeks
reaching out for us
for slow moves
Carrying life to our pants
and death to our edges
and even if we did sometimes didnt
so we could feel strength in our negations
tomorrow
And the good feeling of laughing long and hard
at jokes played on ourselves only
after that slick feeling of malt liquor
wine and other samples we braved
was gone
We remember the long hours of how
we preped to be there and hoped
that we looked like
we were just passing through
Praying it would last long enough
for us to forget that we'd
get home too late
and were still
very very
young

Confession

My life has been
a war zone
between a carnival
of tears
The circus is not coming
this year
it has always been here
(ask any clown)
The legs of beast cocked against me
on the merry-go-round of death
I take my lesson
from the trees
throw my arms to the skies
and beg the heavens
for my life

For a Spirit

you'd never have to wait
for the rain to stop
to go outside
maybe the same person who made
your eyes so glassy sent you to me
once when i was scared and asked
you please can i hold on for just
a while you let me at the risk of
something precious
you began to squeeze and our heads
became one and you gave me books
to read and a trade in on
eyes and ears and was very much
concerned with my happiness
call it dream for our purpose
cause no one would believe
it happened for real
somebody came in the door to ask
if we would spend the night
and i started laughing saying
we have been here forever
suddenly we are singing songs
and my name isnt what it was
but what i am thank you
i ask you again who sent you to me
and you project the smell of evergreen
something to remember you by and are leaving
to put me back on the other side
scared again i tell you i want to stay forever
and jump on the park tables and you
knowing that i am not a checker take me down
to slide down your body
i know i saw you hold me in your hands and
sniff me into your nostrils like a vapor
but why are you over there
and why is this evergreen always with me

what Sunni say

shoot me for
the moon through
the burning spreading head
open me up the me of me
put it inside where i need
let me carry it around
all day
taste like it the night
all long and songless
smell like it into
the nights of
next week's need

Rain Spread

Last Night threw her legs
open to me
in response to my letter
saying that
    where i was going
    i wouldn't be long
    please write
    to where i going
Last Night's lips
running wet
mid-month woman
secretions and
tears of rain
hairy tangles
That's what happens
thigh across thigh
Night's hair tangles
to give us darkness
Rain is a slanting process
how else could i
spread this night
without lying down

One-January

nuts as elderberry
hugging in front of
movie clips wondering
is that some trick
we are real and did
they really happen
or was that made for
us to hug in front of
we need somebody to hold
because there are things
that alone will scare you
we need somebody to hold
because there are things
that alone will . . .

If It Would Please You To Know
(for Mervyn)

i am full of things
in you i cannot say
    we laugh
fiercely we laugh
to the edge of recognition
as if it were the last
battle for happiness
we can immitate
its our tears we're
holding i know
you did better
your's take you into fever
mine grow heavy behind
the front of my feelings
take the elevator down
in the basement turn right
i missed that bus anyway
seems i'm always running for something.
its much harder to treat a man than
for a man to treat a woman sometimes
    i believe
it was only that i wanted you to tell me
that you need we need
we write poems don't we
and what you need but mostly
would you let me give you
    i need
your elevator all green
tear stained and brassy
when i came to you comic strip ink
stained memories and fingertips i saw
those black guards over your eyes
daring me to open dreams
you were making beside me
giving no clue to what i was a part of
it was your conception of me
i was speaking of when i woke you
to say that i was dying

II
standing amongst the weeds
and crushed dixie cups
the bare armed men were
playing pan music
i came here
home there would be washing
that would steal your smell
from between me

III
i bought a bloodstone
that will lay against
my chest as long as songs are made
and we have been singing here for
ever.

Last Meeting

silly blinking
red light of off duty
money pot empty
in the floor
shameless hot seat
of sit too long
papa-man get me off your
dashboard.
under this el, baby
you're killing me
two used matches on the door
stuff guilt under pale bloodless
finger tips cabbie
they say the world is getting smaller, sugar
but big enough for me
& hurt from here to arizona
i'll ram those wipers
up my tear ducts
drive me home
sweet gone lover.

Winter Morning Song

frost licks the inside
out to the outside of this window
the plants were not moved
and lighter curtains made
no way for heavy drapes
i did not move the big fan
sitting in the eye on the
other side that watches me
and though i'm freezing
i'm not cold at all.
as long as the fan stays
where it was when you
were here in summer with me
and if you don't stay all the
long winter long
i'll walk around this room
with summer in me
though i'm in here alone
and freezing to death

Morningwater

About the truest thing
    i've ever seen
was my faucet in the morning
Spitting black bullits
    Hot Rusty Emerging
And Cleansing
Like me

Sunni *

She haunts hidden stores
for old blues tunes
that she learns but knows well
and sings long and loud
through her guts quietly
She sneeks up on winos and ladies
of strained knees and aching thighs
keeping them from seats they
don't want to touch
She stalks the night in spite of warnings
with clenched fist of screaming
hot peppers for sucker fools
that dare her travel
Protected by her gri-gri
from a truth bearing poet
She knows no limits
has been known to smile and has friends
that she guards from our enemies
Searching African soil beneath her feet
her tiptoes roar with madness and dance
messages of our coming of her danger
yes
Her mother's womb had a window
so she know exectly what she
was coming into